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Chair: Mr. Díaz de la Guardia (Vice-Chair) (Spain)

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In the absence of Mr. Djani (Indonesia), Mr. Díaz de la Guardia (Spain), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Tribute to the memory of His Majesty Bhumibol Adulyadej, the late King of Thailand

1. **The Chair**, on behalf of all members of the Committee, expressed condolences to the Government and people of Thailand on the passing of His Majesty Bhumibol Adulyadej, the late King of Thailand.

Agenda item 16: Information and communications technologies for development (A/71/67-E/2016/51, A/71/67-E/2016/51/Corr.1 and A/71/307)

2. **Ms. Sirimanne** (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society at the regional and international levels (A/71/67-E/2016/51), said that the report included information provided by 32 United Nations entities and other international organizations and stakeholders, and covered stakeholders' activities in 2015. The report pointed out that digital divides persisted within and between countries and needed to be addressed. Half the world's population was not using the Internet and therefore could not take advantage of its social and economic benefits. Internet use in developed countries was 81 per cent, compared to 40 per cent in developing countries and 15 per cent in the least developed countries. The gender gap in Internet use had grown from 11 per cent in 2013 to 12 per cent in 2016, while it was 31 per cent in the least developed countries. A digital divide also existed between rural and urban areas within countries, with only 29 per cent of the world's rural population covered by a third-generation (3G) network. Digital divides exacerbated and were associated with differences in skills and capabilities. Efforts should be taken to provide affordable access and develop content and capabilities; more should be done to ensure that the least developed countries and poor and marginalized communities were not left behind.

3. The close links between the information society and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda) had been illustrated in the report. During the General Assembly's 2015 overall review of the implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society, Member States had called for the close alignment of the Summit process and the 2030 Agenda and had emphasized the cross-cutting contribution of information and communications technologies (ICTs) to the Sustainable Development Goals. Member States had encouraged a prominent profile for ICTs in the Technology Facilitation Mechanism. With regard to how ICTs could help achieve the 2030 Agenda, it was important to take into account not only their direct impact, but also the far-reaching changes in how Governments, businesses and citizens behaved and interacted. The greater opportunities brought by ICTs were accompanied by challenges, however, including the risk of greater inequality arising from digital divides, threats to personal security and privacy, and possible environmental costs.

4. Work by UNCTAD in its capacity as secretariat of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development included the examination, with a view to development outcomes, of new and emerging technologies, including automation, the Internet of Things and big data. For example, devices associated with the Internet of Things had been used to identify climate trends and mobilize resources during disease outbreaks. Although automation could increase productivity, it could also make labour redundant. The overall impacts of ICTs required careful analysis. Following the submission of a proposal to the United States Department of Commerce National Telecommunications and Information Administration in March 2016, the transition of the stewardship of the Internet Assigned Numbers Authority function had taken place on 1 October.

5. During the overall review of the implementation of the World Summit outcomes, the General Assembly had acknowledged the Internet Governance Forum as a multi-stakeholder platform for discussion of Internet governance issues and had extended its mandate for a further 10 years. Following the request made in General Assembly resolution 70/125, the Chair of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development had established a working group to develop recommendations on how to further implement enhanced cooperation as envisioned in the Tunis

Agenda for the Information Society. It had held its first meeting on 30 September and would submit a report to the Commission at its twenty-first session in 2018. In December 2015, the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination had issued a joint statement pledging support for the full implementation of the outcomes of the 10-year review of the World Summit. The past decade had demonstrated the value of cooperation and dialogue between Governments, international organizations, the private sector, the technical community and civil society. The ability of those diverse stakeholders to work together in the common interest of a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented information society was inspiring.

6. **Ms. Roudil** (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)), introducing the report of the Director-General of UNESCO on communication for development programmes in the United Nations system, transmitted in a note by the Secretary-General (A/71/307), said that the report was evidence of the engagement of United Nations agencies in the field of communication and information. The report, which had received input from five United Nations organizations, provided an overview of activities in the United Nations system to facilitate the empowerment of individuals and communities through communication and participation in the media. Since the previous report in 2014, much progress had been made in coordinating the efforts of United Nations organizations and setting a cohesive agenda for medium- and long-term action. Sustainable Development Goal 16 called for peaceful and inclusive societies and the building of effective, accountable and inclusive institutions, which would require public access to information and the protection of fundamental freedoms. Those developments indicated the continued importance of media and communication as tools for sustainable development and demonstrated the need for United Nations organizations to work in a coordinated and coherent manner.

7. The indicator framework for assessing progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals had created new, updated and highly targeted reporting mechanisms for communication for development in the United Nations system. UNESCO contributed to Goal 16, target 16.10,on ensuring public access to information and protecting fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements. It facilitated effective media systems at the country level and continued to increase pluralism and diversity in terms of operations and editorial content. That work included ensuring equal access to the overall strategies and policies of media, not only as media consumers but as content producers and contributors. A key priority in that context was the achievement of full gender equality in media, in line with the UNESCO Global Priority Gender Equality.

8. UNESCO supported community media by working with Member States to build an enabling legislative environment in areas such as licensing, spectrum access and funding, and to build capacity in key skills, in particular on ICTs. A seminar entitled "Community Media Sustainability: Strengthening Policies and Funding" had been held in September 2015 to coordinate international action and produce concrete recommendations in that area. Community media was a focus of World Radio Day, celebrated annually on 13 February. World Press Freedom Day, the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists and the International Day for Universal Access to Information were marked annually to encourage freedom of expression and access to information. The Riga and Finlandia Declarations, produced as part of World Press Freedom Day in 2015 and 2016, reaffirmed freedom of expression, press freedom and access to information as fundamental rights necessary to the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals. Those areas of focus were represented in the International Programme for the Development of Communication, a mechanism that had been reaffirmed in General Assembly resolution 70/93. In 2015 and 2016, 122 projects, costing US$1.9 million, had been approved by the Programme. The largest share of those projects related to initiatives in Africa, in line with the UNESCO Global Priority Africa. The overall priority of UNESCO was facilitating media development and the role of media in sustainable development, which had framed its contribution to formulating the Sustainable Development Goals and their indicators.

9. In light of the opportunities for UNESCO to report its work in relation to Sustainable Development Goal 16, she suggested that the reports on communication for development in the United Nations system, which predated the 2030 Agenda, had been

superseded. The situation had changed significantly since the first Inter-Agency Round Table on Communication for Development in 1980 and the launch of the annual reports on communication for development programmes in the United Nations system in 1996. That was particularly true with the advent of ICTs and the opportunities they offered for interaction and automation. No Inter-Agency Round Table had taken place since 2014 when the discussion had centred on the lack of high-level representation and financing, and the prospects of holding another were in question due to financial constraints and an increased focus in the United Nations system on specific and effective action. Previous reports had noted the lack of substantive discussion on the part of Member States who appeared to prefer to focus on ICTs for sustainable development. The work of United Nations agencies and organizations in the field of communication for development should be dovetailed more directly with the Sustainable Development Goals, in line with the call for the United Nations to be more fit-for-purpose.

10. Alongside reporting under the Sustainable Development Goals, the report on communication for development programmes might appear to be a duplication of effort. Reporting on Sustainable Development Goals should suffice to indicate how communication was contributing to specific issues, including Sustainable Development Goal 16, by expanding the environment for public access to information and fundamental freedoms. Some might also believe that the Inter-Agency Round Table had served its purpose. She drew the Committee's attention to the recommendation to discontinue both the reports on communication for development and the Inter-Agency Round Table in favour of a more direct contribution by the United Nations system to the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.

11. **Ms. Plasai** (Thailand), speaking in her national capacity, noted the commitment of the late King of Thailand to realizing the potential of ICT for development. Speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, she said that ICTs were important to achieving internationally agreed development goals. The Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development (Addis Ababa Action Agenda) and the 2030 Agenda recognized ICTs as critical enablers of development and important levers of change for achieving sustainable development. ICTs also held tremendous potential for the eradication of poverty and the promotion of the three pillars of sustainable development. The Group welcomed the statement of the 10-year review of the World Summit on the implementation of the World Summit outcomes and reaffirmed the vision of the 10-year review of the World Summit beyond 2015. ICTs should play a prominent role in promoting inclusive growth and development. The Group of 77 and China recognized the catalytic and integral link between access to ICTs, technological development and sustainable development.

12. While according to the Secretary-General's report, 95 per cent of the world's population was covered by mobile networks, the Group wished to emphasize the need to bridge the digital divide between and within countries. Unequal access to the Internet persisted, with broadband networks and services more widely available and affordable in developed than developing countries and, limited broadband access in rural areas in most developing countries. In such situations, it might not be possible to harness the potential of ICTs for sustainable development. Earlier in the year, in its capacity as Chair of the Group of 77 and China, Thailand had organized the Meeting of Experts on ICTs and Sustainable Development for South-South Cooperation to push forward the Group's vision of the critical role of ICTs in building a smart nation and its commitment to the goals set out at the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the overall review of the implementation of the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society. Members of the Group of 77 and China had stepped up cooperation with the aim of closing the digital divide among them.

13. A multidimensional approach that included quality, affordability, relevance and local content was required to address the digital divide. Developed countries and stakeholders should provide enhanced and coordinated support to developing countries through technology transfer, effective and sustainable technical assistance and capacity-building. The Group of 77 and China had reaffirmed that principle at the first multi-stakeholder forum on science, technology and innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals, held in 2016. A long-standing supporter of the Technology Facilitation Mechanism, the Group of 77 and China looked forward to its upcoming activities

and to exploring ways of harnessing science, technology and innovation to implement the Sustainable Development Goals at the second multi-stakeholder forum in 2017.

14. The gender gap in ICT access and use gave cause for concern. Capacity-building was important to all, including the most vulnerable, who should be empowered to become content creators, not merely users. The growing importance and contribution of ICTs to development in such areas as health, agriculture and humanitarian response should be highlighted. Countries needed to invest in capacity-building and education to use ICTs to build on the new sustainable development agenda and derive social and economic gains from technological innovation. The Group attached great importance to the full and effective implementation of the outcomes of the Geneva and Tunis phases of the World Summit, including provisions relating to Internet governance. In an increasingly interdependent world, the representation and participation of developing countries in Internet governance should be strengthened, to ensure the stability, security and continuity of the Internet, in accordance with the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society. The Group would work closely with its development partners on the draft resolution on ICTs for development, to ensure the attainment of inclusive sustainable development, in particular through ICTs.

15. **Mr. Ismail** (Brunei Darussalam), speaking on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), said that ICTs played a significant role in human progress, including economic and social growth and development. Thanks to the rapid pace of innovation, ICTs were increasingly central to everyday life. It was an important instrument to connect ASEAN members to the mainstream of global development. Given the integrated and indivisible nature of the Sustainable Development Goals, the cross-cutting contribution of ICTs could act as either a leveller or a divider between countries. The international community must seize the opportunity to harness the full potential of ICTs for sustainable development and provide universal, affordable access to ICTs. The overall review of the implementation of World Summit outcomes had illustrated the successes — in particular on connectivity, innovation and access to ICTs. Rapid growth had been observed in fixed and wireless broadband, mobile devices, cloud computing and big data. Although ASEAN remained committed to the World Summit vision of a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented information society, uneven results remained a cause of concern, as did persistent challenges, namely the digital divide and the socioeconomic gap between developed and developing countries. Those challenges needed to be urgently addressed to ensure that no one was left behind.

16. According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), only 41 per cent of the population of developing countries would enjoy access to the Internet by the end of 2016, compared to 84 per cent in developed countries. Since the majority of future new Internet users would come from developing countries, there was an urgent need to bridge the digital divide between developed and developing countries. Enabling policy environments and international cooperation should be strengthened, with a view to improving affordability, connectivity, access, education, content and capabilities. ICTs had played a critical role in regional integration and connectivity efforts, and in narrowing the development gaps within and between Member States. ICTs would also play an increasingly pivotal role in furthering economic integration and community-building.

17. ASEAN remained committed to the development and promotion of ICTs in the region, including through the implementation of the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025 and the ASEAN ICT Master Plan 2020 — successor to the ASEAN ICT Master Plan 2015 that had been successfully completed. Under the completed plan, the export of ICT services had increased, while the costs of Internet access and mobile subscriptions had fallen sharply. Government services had been digitized and there was increased awareness of cybersecurity. The focus going forward would be on developing human capacity under the ASEAN ICT Master Plan 2020 in order to transition to a digitally-enabled economy that was secure, sustainable and transformative. Since digital economies were knowledge-based economies, ASEAN Member States welcomed the participation, expertise and experiences of different stakeholders with respect to developing those skills. The ASEAN ICT Master Plan 2020 set out a vision for adapting to the digital economy through eight strategic thrusts that included economic development and human capital development.

18. **Ms. Beckles** (Trinidad and Tobago), speaking on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), said that the level playing field sought by the sustainable development agenda could be provided through equitable access to the means of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals at the national level. All nations and peoples must be equipped with the capacity, infrastructure and knowledge to keep up with ICTs and harness their potential to improve quality of life. As a group comprising small island developing States, CARICOM faced unique challenges to sustainable development, in particular acute vulnerability to the unmitigated impact of climate change and natural disasters. In the past week, the peoples of Haiti, Jamaica, the Bahamas and other CARICOM countries had sustained significant damage and loss of life following the landfall of Hurricane Matthew.

19. Further challenges included dependence on volatile export markets, narrow resource bases and limited economies of scale. As middle-income countries, most CARICOM members had limited access to development financing, which impeded their efforts to tackle localized poverty and inequality. An enhanced capacity to participate in evolving knowledge spaces and increased access to and application of ICTs would help to overcome those challenges. Furthermore, ICTs could play a pivotal role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goals 5, 13 and 17. CARICOM considered that technological platforms, devices and knowledge spaces were instruments that could help achieve good governance, social accountability and improved delivery of public services, and improve the well-being of their people.

20. The collaborative approach to development maintained by CARICOM leveraged the benefits of combined competencies to overcome the limitations of island nations' small size. The region had already made strides towards achieving the overarching objective of the 2030 Agenda and would continue to adopt a collaborative approach to developing an enabling environment and enhancing the regional ICT landscape, in accordance with the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway (Samoa Pathway). In September, CARICOM leaders had endorsed the Roadmap for the Single ICT Space, which was expected to be implemented well before the 2030 deadline for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

21. National efforts must be bolstered by a parallel and robust multilateral response to eroding the digital divides between and within countries. ICTs formed the bedrock of modern society; any nation not equipped with ICT infrastructure and capacity — and inclusive access to up-to-date innovations and knowledge — would be left behind. Implementation of the 2030 Agenda required sustained dialogue on best practices in ICT development, multi-stakeholder collaboration and private-public partnerships. Resources would need to be transferred from developed countries to the less and least developed countries, including small island developing States and middle-income countries, which still lagged behind. In that regard, CARICOM supported the work of the United Nations and ITU, which had first launched the World Summit in 2003. CARICOM welcomed the continuation of conversation and work under the framework of the World Summit, which remained relevant to efforts towards implementing the 2030 Agenda.

22. **Mr. Bin Momen** (Bangladesh), speaking on behalf of the Group of Least Developed Countries, said that ICTs had proven to be a catalyst for economic growth and a force that could empower billions of people. The spread of ICT and global interconnectedness was recognized in the 2030 Agenda, particularly in target 9.c, as having great potential to accelerate human progress, bridge the digital divide and develop knowledge societies. Internet use had tripled in a decade; people, institutions, researchers and Governments were more connected than ever. Global averages on network coverage masked disparities in Internet access between countries: only 7 per cent of households in the least developed countries had Internet access, compared to 34 per cent in developing countries. Disparities also prevailed within countries, particularly between urban and rural areas. Current innovations in ICT were largely designed for the developed world. Market forces alone could not meet the needs of the least developed countries. Low Internet use overlapped with subpar services and high access costs. Rates of fixed broadband subscriptions remained marginal in the least developed countries; the 2014 average had been 0.43 per 100 people. The Alliance for Affordable Internet estimated that, at current trends, target 9.c on

universal and affordable access to the Internet in the least developed countries by 2020 would be missed by 22 years, due to high connectivity costs. The *World Development Report 2016* suggested that the impact of ICT on productivity, opportunity and government accountability had been far less than expected. To harness the benefits of ICT, technology should be supported by appropriate know-how, institutions, private-public partnerships and a vibrant business climate.

23. The least developed countries wished to put forward six recommendations on how to achieve the Goal 9 target on universal and affordable access to the Internet in the least developed countries. First, countries should adopt appropriate policies and strategies to ensure the availability, affordability and accessibility of ICT services, including broadband technologies. Those policies should be coupled with modern infrastructure and service delivery systems. Second, ICT services and facilities must be combined with relevant skills, capabilities and opportunities. Appropriate literacy and numeracy training would allow citizens to seize the opportunities of ICT. Third, appropriate technologies and know-how were needed to adapt and commercialize ICTs for local needs and circumstances. The Technology Bank for the Least Developed Countries (Technology Bank) could foster the transfer of technology and know-how to the least developed countries. Fourth, least developed countries needed adequate financial support to build their ICT networks and procure instruments, hardware and software to have access to modern equipment. Fifth, ICT partnerships should be fostered through South-South and triangular cooperation; his country had hosted a side event on that issue during the high-level segment of the seventy-first session of the General Assembly. Finally, development partners should honour the commitments made in the Istanbul Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011-2020 to continue providing places and scholarships for students and trainees from the least developed countries (target 4.b of the 2030 Agenda).

24. **Mr. Sareer** (Maldives), speaking on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), said that small island States were unable to capitalize fully on the potential of ICTs to improve people's lives. AOSIS had participated in the review of World Summit outcomes in 2015 and was satisfied with its results. Efforts to bridge, rather than exacerbate, the digital divide should continue. The implementation of the 2030 Agenda relied heavily on the development and transfer of ICTs; indeed, Sustainable Development Goals 4 and 9 made specific reference to increasing access to ICTs. General Assembly resolution 70/125 also called for the close alignment of the World Summit process and the 2030 Agenda and highlighted the cross-cutting contribution of ICTs to the Sustainable Development Goals and poverty eradication. AOSIS noted the emphasis in the Secretary-General's report on the use of ICTs in early warning systems for natural disasters and emergency communications, which was particularly beneficial to small island developing States. More work remained to be done, however, and there was a need to assess how and in what areas ICTs should be transferred and how to incentivize access.

25. Access to ICT remained a challenge in small island States, where populations were scattered; mobile cellular prices were relatively high; and infrastructure to support ICT development and deployment, and capacity for their effective use, were lacking. Small populations and geographical factors limited the number of operators able to sustainably compete in the market. A comprehensive approach and targeted policies were needed to overcome those obstacles. Small island developing States were particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change and needed policies for increased self-reliance. In that regard, ICTs could help in evacuation efforts and communicate critical information to the public. They were already being used in disaster risk reduction.

26. Extreme weather events also threatened the stable operation of critical infrastructure systems and could compromise telecommunications such as the Internet, which relied largely on fixed data connections and power supplies. Small island States therefore needed to increase access to other kinds of communication devices that could facilitate the operation of essential services and emergency management when backbone communication infrastructure was lost during natural disasters. The potential for ICTs in island States was vast, varying from reducing barriers of distance to enhancing tourism and economic growth, and allowing island States to work together. Small island developing States recognized the revolutionary momentum of

knowledge societies. The Samoa Pathway also identified the need for enhanced access and use of ICT infrastructure networks to sustain high levels of economic growth. He urged the international community to work together to realize and harness the potential and opportunity of ICTs as the true means of implementation of its goals and aspirations.

27. **Ms. Ponce** (Philippines) said that ICT was a transformative and necessary enabler for nation-building, poverty eradication, inclusive growth and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. In recognition of that fact and of the need for an enabling policy environment, the Philippines had upgraded its ICT government agency to a fully-fledged Ministry in 2015. The mandate of the new Ministry included ensuring the provision of strategic, reliable, cost-efficient and citizen-centred ICT infrastructure, systems and resources; ensuring universal access to secure ICT services, promoting digital literacy; empowering disadvantaged groups through ICT, including the elderly, persons with disabilities and indigenous and minority groups promoting the creation of local content, applications and services; and ensuring individual rights to privacy and confidentiality of personal information. The Philippines fully supported the World Summit vision of an information society where everyone could create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge, which would enable individuals, communities and nations to achieve their full potential through sustainable development and a better quality of life. Her delegation supported the World Summit outcomes and action lines for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. ICT should be promoted to enhance key public services, such as education, health and revenue generation. That approach was exemplified in the Tech4Ed project that provided a single online platform for users to access information on education, agriculture and government services. In towns, villages and rural areas without shared Internet access facilities, access was facilitated through community e-centres. The project had won a WSIS Project Prize in 2016.

28. The global community needed to address the broadening digital divide within and among States. Appropriate infrastructure, increased speeds and reduced costs for broadband access were priorities for her Government, which was building a national broadband network and extending coverage of free Wi-Fi services to poorer and isolated municipalities and rural areas. That activity was aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 9. Although domestic resource mobilization and encouraging private sector investment were an important start, international cooperation for capacity-building and technology transfer would be essential. The upcoming multi-stakeholder forum on science, technology and innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals would be important in that regard. In the move towards a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented information society, it was important to remember that the collective efforts of Governments, the private sector and a highly critical public were essential to capitalizing on current and future ICT gains. Those gains must be achieved without jeopardizing the rights, personal security and privacy of individuals, despite the growing pervasiveness of the Internet, technology and social media in everyday life.

29. **Mr. Triantoto** (Indonesia) said that while mobile broadband and Long-Term Evolution (LTE) networks had reached more than half the world's population; the remaining half remained unconnected and unaware of ICTs. More must be done to ensure that the least developed countries and poor and marginalized communities in all countries were not left behind. In some situations, ICTs would not be the best tool for development. They could be disruptive and abet social tensions. Nonetheless, their transformative effects were undeniable and they would act as an enabler of the global transformation called for in the 2030 Agenda.

30. Implementation of the outcomes of the 10-year review of the World Summit should be closely aligned with the 2030 Agenda. Access to ICTs and ICT capacities should be improved. To that end, action was required in three areas: investing in infrastructure, capacity-building, technology and knowledge transfer and integrated regulatory frameworks; building public confidence in the use and security of ICTs; optimizing lessons learned through the development of a platform to exchange good ICT practices, identify issues and solve common challenges — the Internet Governance Forum, under the aegis of the United Nations as an outcome of the World Summit, and South-South and triangular cooperation could provide space for that activity.

31. In Indonesia, a national e-commerce road map was being finalized, and the Palapa Ring Project would boost connectivity and enhance inclusive growth and sustainable development. The project would connect the seven major islands of Indonesia by fibre optic cable, while the e-commerce road map was expected to create a thousand start-ups in 2016 and expedite US$130 billion worth of business transactions by 2020. The Indonesian parliament was considering the revision of legislation from 2008 on electronic information and transactions. At the global level, Indonesia had hosted the Internet Governance Forum in 2013 and was a member of the Global Commission on Internet Governance and the Group of Governmental Experts on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security.

32. **Mr. Sinha** (India) said that improved legal and regulatory frameworks were required to make full use of technological innovations. The Digital India programme was aimed at empowering citizens through improved governance, on-demand services and digital infrastructure for all. While entrepreneurs were inventing innovative business models and platforms, the public authorities were striving to improve service delivery using ICT tools. The programme would also help to bridge the digital divide and empower vulnerable sections of the population. Its areas of focus would include broadband highways, universal access to mobile connectivity, e-governance, information for all, electronic manufacturing and ICT for jobs and early harvest programmes.

33. The development landscape was becoming more responsive and inclusive. Increased ICT accessibility and affordability were allowing a broad spectrum of e-services to reach all groups in society, including the poor, those in remote areas and other disadvantaged groups. Those e-services ranged from distance learning to telemedicine and agriculture information services. In addition, ICTs were used for disaster preparedness and early warning, and were boosting the efficiency of transport and logistics. The development of an ICT-based land registry and management system had streamlined administrative processes and simplified transactions. E-government provided easy access to forms, birth certificates and other information, while open government data promoted innovation and helped small and medium-sized enterprises to access business opportunities. In a landmark success in the area of financial inclusion, a biometric identification system had been combined with banking services and mobile phone technologies. More than 1 billion Indian citizens had been issued identity cards as a result. In March 2017, India would host the tenth International Conference on Theory and Practice of Electronic Governance.

34. **Mr. Ronen** (Israel) said that, over the past decade, ICT had penetrated nearly all corners of the globe and revolutionized many facets of daily life. Unlike traditional finite resources, the knowledge fuelling ICT was constrained only by the limits of human imagination and creativity. Knowledge could be shared with people on the other side of the globe, enabling fruitful collaboration and transformational developments. Progress had been made thanks to cooperation between Governments and the private sector, and to an environment conducive to investment in ICTs. Maintaining that course would require the collective effort of all sectors — Governments, private enterprise, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international institutions.

35. The commitment to connecting the unconnected must be reaffirmed. It was essential to address the digital divide in order to ensure fulfilment of the Sustainable Development Goals and leave no one behind. That would require the successful development, utilization and application of ICT. In the 68 years since its establishment, Israel had been transformed through hard work, directed investment and determination — from a land of swamps and sand into a start-up nation. Israel remained committed to cooperation and to reaching out to its neighbours and partners to share its technological achievements.

36. **Mr. Lopyrev** (Russian Federation), welcoming the outcomes of the World Summit review process, said that his delegation supported the continuation of that process, which should focus on establishing a secure and reliable regime for the use of ICT, under the auspices of the United Nations and on the basis of international standards, principles and rules on the behaviour of States in the information society. The United Nations system must promote a deeper understanding of the rapidly developing information society and its impact on Governments, the economy and the community. He agreed with the majority of

conclusions contained in the Secretary-General's report, including the importance of bridging the digital divide that many countries rightly considered a key constraint on development, and expressed support for the further development of broadband services, electronic trade, cloud computing and the Internet of Things, and the need to ensure confidence in ICT and appropriate security measures for its use.

37. The development and widespread use of ICT had become a strong trend in global development. Its use was essential to increasing national economic competitiveness, expanding opportunities for economic integration and strengthening public administration. Furthermore, ICT was a key means of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. In that regard, discussions on the development of ICT should be guided by the principle of the leading role of ITU as the specialized agency of the United Nations for the international regulation of telecommunications and ICT development. The relevance of the principles contained in the Tunis Agenda should be emphasized; Governments must, on an equal basis, play their part and perform their duties to resolve international public policy issues pertaining to the Internet. That approach required the development of an international legal framework for the Internet, under the auspices of the United Nations and with the equal distribution of authority among all States, rendering the global system the heritage of humankind.

38. **Mr. Perera** (Sri Lanka) said that despite 10 years of remarkable growth in ICTs, including in fixed and wireless broadband Internet, mobile Internet, smartphones and tablets, cloud computing and big data, the digital divide persisted, as did the gap in broadband access between developed and developing countries, within countries and, especially, between genders. Bridging the digital divide was essential to achieving sustainable development, notably by mobilizing resources for investment in the ICT sector, which remained a key challenge for developing countries. International cooperation was also vital, while far-reaching policies and strategies could contribute at the national level.

39. Sri Lanka had a separate ministry dedicated to telecommunications and digital infrastructure; the Government had recognized ICTs as key to meeting development challenges. Secondary, tertiary and informal vocational education increasingly included ICT in their curricula. Facilitating financial inclusion was also part of the national ICT strategy. The ICT sector in Sri Lanka had grown considerably; IT exports were expected to bring in US$1 billion by the end of 2016. The national broadband policy and the Government's free Wi-Fi project were helping to narrow the digital divide and harness the power of ICTs for development. Increased mobile and broadband penetration was benefiting some of the most remote areas of Sri Lanka. As a multi-ethnic, multicultural society, Sri Lanka had taken the lead in establishing the technical conditions to facilitate the use of local languages on the Internet. A legal framework for e-governance and e-commerce had been introduced. In 2015, Sri Lanka had become the first South Asian country to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Use of Electronic Communications in International Contracts and had become a State party to the Council of Europe Convention on Cybercrime.

40. **Mr. AlGhunaim** (Saudi Arabia) said that it was important to follow-up on the World Summit outcomes and to bridge the digital divide. Saudi Arabia had adopted the Vision for WSIS Beyond 2015 and made efforts to implement the recommendations made by the World Summit since its launch in 2003, including by participating in the Secretary-General's Working Group on Internet Governance. ITU had conferred its ICTs in Sustainable Development Award on the King of Saudi Arabia in 2012, and the Kingdom had also won several WSIS Project Prizes. The Saudi Vision 2030 economic plan included measures to strengthen electronic services for economic development by establishing an enabling environment for investment in ICT.

41. Both the Tunis Agenda and the World Summit outcome documents had adopted a multi-stakeholder approach to responsibility for the Internet and stressed that policy authority for Internet-related public policy issues was the sovereign right of States. However, progress on Internet governance had been slow, in particular as it related to enhanced cooperation to enable Governments, on an equal footing, to carry out their roles and responsibilities in international public policy issues (Tunis Agenda, para. 69). He welcomed General Assembly resolution 70/125, which requested the Chair of the Commission on Science and Technology for Development, through the Economic and Social Council, to establish a working group to

develop recommendations on how to further implement enhanced cooperation, as envisioned in the Tunis Agenda. However, the Commission on Science and Technology for Development had not followed that recommendation in full. He therefore called on the General Assembly to ensure more equitable representation in that working group for the different regional groups.

42. **Ms.** Yilianne **Sánchez Rodríguez** (Cuba) said that despite the evolution in innovation and access to ICT, the digital divide between and within countries gave cause for concern. There was an urgent need to eliminate the obstacles to ICT access for developing countries. The lack of political will on the part of many developed countries and a desire to protect their unjust international economic order were key factors in slowing progress towards fair, equitable and inclusive information. She called for follow-up on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda pertaining to ICT. Inappropriate use of ICTs, including the use of social networks that contravened international law and the well-being of any State, could endanger the international community and must cease. The use of ICTs must be fully compatible with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and international law, in particular the sovereignty of States, non-interference in the internal affairs of States and internationally recognized norms.

43. The Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) had declared its region a zone of peace and had recognized the value of the Internet as a tool to promote peace and human development. Despite the embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba for nearly half a century, Cuba sought to develop the Internet for all with the engagement of the population in order to improve productivity and economic growth. Solidarity, partnership and cooperation between Governments and all other stakeholders were necessary to build the information society.

44. **Mr. Castro Cordoba** (Costa Rica) said that the information society could make a valuable contribution to the promotion and achievement of sustainable development, particularly since the adoption of major international instruments such as the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the 2030 Agenda, the World Summit outcome documents and the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. ICTs were fundamental to democratizing processes and more effective implementation of international instruments. Costa Rica was committed to strengthening the multi-stakeholder model of Internet governance and closer cooperation that acknowledged the key role of the private sector and civil society and the needs of developing countries, in particular those referred to as middle-income countries, whose capacities should be strengthened to facilitate their integration in global value chains.

45. The information society should promote and ensure all human rights and recognize online all human rights protected offline. Some of those fundamental freedoms, such as freedom of opinion and expression, and of association, and an independent press, would entail the protection of journalists, bloggers and human rights defenders. Human rights should be reflected in the implementation of international agreements concerning ICT, which would benefit the ICT field and help to build more peaceful and inclusive societies that could in turn benefit from their transformative potential. Efforts should be made to expand access to ICTs and create capacities for the generation of new content. An open and safe Internet should be ensured, in order to facilitate the economic empowerment of women and girls and bridge the digital divide. An environment conducive to working together openly and safely should be established, with a view to building world-class skills for continuous innovation that would generate new and better products and services, promote investment in sustainable infrastructure and develop public-private partnerships.

46. Costa Rica was committed to those principles and would promote them as Chair of the Freedom Online Coalition, which would hold its sixth annual meeting in Costa Rica that month, building on the outcomes of the first multi-stakeholder forum on science, technology and innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals and the Technology Facilitation Mechanism. The Coalition would strengthen discussion at the second multi-stakeholder forum in 2017, with a view to bolstering implementation of the 2030 Agenda and other relevant international agreements.

47. **Mr. Ye** Yongfeng (Singapore) said that while digitalization brought serious challenges, including the disruption of business models, job displacement due to

automation, cyberattacks and digital exclusion, it would create new jobs and opportunities. Leveraging the potential additional economic output of the digital economy would be essential to achieving sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

48. In Singapore, the Committee on the Future Economy, established in October 2015, would develop strategies for a vibrant and resilient economy with sustainable growth that would create value and opportunities for all. Three areas had been identified where the digital economy could be leveraged for better development. First, businesses should be supported to adopt new technologies and transform business models to increase competitiveness at home and abroad. A specific package had been introduced in Singapore to help companies adopt robotic solutions to improve productivity. Second, Governments could and should do more to support their people in seizing new job opportunities, which would require collaborating with stakeholders to develop digital talent. His Government had launched life-long learning programmes to provide ICT skills training at all stages of life and career and had invested in young people by organizing coding programmes in schools. Third, data should be collected and used more effectively to improve implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the provision of public services. In Singapore, an integrated map system, developed to help government agencies deliver location-based public services and information, was also used by the private sector and the community. Data analysis improved public transport management, while geospatial technologies could be used to monitor flooding and provide health care and better municipal services. Singapore was committed to helping other developing countries adapt to the future economy by providing technical assistance through the Singapore Cooperation Programme.

49. **Mr. Sobral Duarte** (Brazil) said that beyond their role in education, gender equality and infrastructure, highlighted in the 2030 Agenda, ICTs were a powerful and transformative tool that could foster economic growth, social inclusion and environmentally-friendly solutions. Their potential would not be fully realized, however, unless they served humanity as a whole. Although efforts to bridge the digital divide between and within countries were crucial, that divide was widening, as was inequality in general. The majority of the poor remained excluded from the benefits of ICTs, while the lack of broadband access posed a critical challenge worldwide. The situation went against the spirit and letter of the 2030 Agenda and must be reversed. Concrete ways in which ICTs could contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals should be identified. In that regard, Brazil supported a prominent profile for ICTs within the Technology Facilitation Mechanism.

50. Brazil upheld and applied the multi-stakeholder model of Internet governance out of the belief that all Internet-related issues could and should be broadly discussed. Distinct issues might require specific frameworks, however, taking into account the differentiated roles and responsibilities associated with the various stakeholders. It was important to continue the balanced implementation of the two processes established by the World Summit. Brazil welcomed the progress achieved at the Internet Governance Forum and hoped that subsequent meetings of the Forum would produce results of interest to a broader set of actors, including those not traditionally linked to it. Implementation of the concept of enhanced cooperation, in compliance with the mandate of the 10-year review of the World Summit, should be jointly advanced with the aim of improving mechanisms to address international public policies pertaining to the Internet. Both processes were mutually reinforcing and could contribute to a more harmonious evolution of the Internet governance ecosystem. While the results of the overall review of implementation of World Summit outcomes by the General Assembly and the multi-stakeholder forum on science, technology and innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals were a signal of progress, much remained to be done. All countries and peoples must have the access to the information society, and capacity to participate in it as both consumers and producers of technologies and content that addressed their needs.

51. **Mr. Raja Zaib Shah** (Malaysia) said that he recognized the potential of ICTs to accelerate growth, eradicate poverty and promote sustainable development, and their role as critical enablers of economic development and investment. The Eleventh Malaysia Plan had launched a vision of Malaysia as an advanced economy and inclusive nation. In an effort to turn Malaysia into a competitive regional technology hub, more than 1.5 billion Malaysian ringgit had been

allocated to initiatives under the plan. Four main strategies would drive ICT: re-energizing the ICT industry, ensuring adequate human capital, improving ICT infrastructure and pursuing digital inclusion. Malaysia was committed to providing high-speed Internet in urban, suburban and rural areas. The inclusive adaptation of ICT solutions would mobilize a future generation equipped with the skills to thrive in a digital economy and participate in economic growth. The contribution of the digital economy to gross domestic product (GDP) had increased in 2015 and was almost at the 18.2 per cent target set for attainment by 2020.

52. Malaysia planned to make civil servants, fresh graduates and young minds agents of change. As technology became more pervasive in everyday life, communities would connect across the world, thereby improving their global job prospects. Two national programmes had been launched in 2015 to help citizens earn additional income from the digital economy. One worked with global and local organizations to develop a crowdsourcing ecosystem in Malaysia, while the other was designed to develop digital entrepreneurship and know-how.

53. **Mr. Kafle** (Nepal) said that, as a landlocked, mountainous and least developed country emerging from a devastating earthquake, Nepal pinned great hope on ICTs. Advances and innovations in ICT offered huge potential for developing countries. The 2030 Agenda aptly recognized the potential of ICT to reduce poverty and inequality, accelerate human progress and social development, bridge the digital divide and develop knowledge societies. In that regard, it was critical to achieve target 9.c under Sustainable Development Goal 9 on providing universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries as early as possible. The least developed countries would benefit substantially from the creation of the Technology Bank in 2017.

54. The rapid pace of innovation in ICTs had more to offer, through knowledge societies, than imagined. Synergies were needed between innovations in the information society and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Realizing the full potential of innovations in technology and their transfer to developing countries, particularly least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States, would accelerate progress towards the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda. The devastating earthquake in Nepal in 2015 had emphasized the role of ICTs in minimizing loss during such disasters, as highlighted in the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030. ICT-enabled early warning systems, real-time information dissemination and post-disaster rescue and recovery campaigns should be promoted as much as possible.

55. The international community should work together to implement the World Summit vision of a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented information society, with more construction collaboration among Governments and other stakeholders to reduce the digital divide within and between countries. Since ICT encompassed all areas of human activity, it required the involvement and cooperation of a wide array of stakeholders, including the private sector and the information society, to harness its potential for the betterment of people and planet. Access to digital opportunity for all, including the least developed countries and poor and marginalized communities in all countries, was crucial to ensuring that no one was left behind.

56. **Mr. Al-Nuaimi** (United Arab Emirates) said that his Government recognized the importance of furthering discussion of ICTs at the international level in the context of the 2030 Agenda and the World Summit outcomes. His delegation and the delegation of Latvia had co-facilitated the high-level meeting on the overall review of implementation of the World Summit outcomes by the General Assembly in December 2015. That meeting had reaffirmed the important role of ICTs as a driver for sustainable development and a tool to support innovation and economic transformation. His Government had invested heavily in the ICT sector, building an enabling environment that allowed it to thrive and set local and regional trends. National ICT development underpinned the country's emergence as a logistics and shipping hub, global finance centre and leader in government service delivery. Independent telecom operators, public-private partnerships and openness to foreign investment were key to the expansion of the ICT sector and the economy. In its 2021 Vision, the Government had set an ambitious goal of providing world-class public infrastructure and government services, and building a knowledge-based economy.

57. The United Arab Emirates attached great importance to achieving gender balance among Internet users and enhancing women's participation in ICT as users and content creators, entrepreneurs, innovators and leaders. It also believed that the Internet should be used to tackle the root causes of extremism by enhancing the participation of- society, encouraging critical thinking and moderation, and creating economic opportunities. In that regard, the United Arab Emirates had cooperated with the United States of America to establish the Sawab Centre, a shining example of a social communication centre that responded to the ideas of extremists and terrorists and urged constructive debate. In conclusion, he stressed the importance of infrastructure development and knowledge and technology transfer, and reaffirmed the World Summit vision of a people-centred, development-oriented information society.

58. **Mr. De Lara Rangel** (Mexico) said that while humankind faced many challenges, the 2030 Agenda provided a strategy for tackling them and ICTs stood out among the many tools available to overcome them. ICTs could bring fresh solutions to the problems of development in a context of globalization and were key to achieving sustained and inclusive economic growth, in particular through competitive economies and access to information and knowledge, especially for developing countries and the least developed countries. Cooperation between all stakeholders should be boosted to ensure effective implementation of the outcomes of the Geneva and Tunis phases of the World Summit through international, regional and national partnerships between stakeholders, including public-private partnerships, and thematic platforms at the national and regional levels. As stressed in the outcome document of the 10-year review, achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals was dependent on bridging the digital divide and, in particular, on universalizing Internet access for the least developed countries and increasing the reach of ICTs.

59. Mexico remained committed to ICT-supported development; access to ICT would expand the digital economy and promote the international community's work on sustainable development. In that regard, his Government had promoted the adoption of the international Open Data Charter. The Internet Governance Forum had become a unique arena for interchange and debate among stakeholders in the Internet ecosystem, including Governments, the private sector, civil society, the technology sector and the academic community. The work of the Forum had shown the importance of collaborative, decentralized Internet management and the multi-stakeholder model of Internet governance. Mexico welcomed the renewal of the Forum's mandate and noted its importance to implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Mexico would host the eleventh annual meeting of the Forum in Guadalajara, Jalisco, in December.

60. **Mr. Yacouba** (Niger), noting that ICTs could have a multiplier effect and were the pathway to bridging the digital divide and accelerating attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals, said that Niger had strengthened governance of its telecommunications and ICT sector. It had established a dedicated ministerial department and a separate regulatory authority, adopted a sector-specific policy and introduced amendments to the legislative and regulatory framework. In terms of digital infrastructure, services and applications, it had deployed a national fibre optic backbone, strengthened international and cross-border broadband connections, implemented e-government services — including ICT services within the public sector — and connected schools to provide Internet access to students, teachers and the community.

61. Niger hoped to bridge the digital divide by providing 100 per cent coverage for telephone services, with a 70 per cent service uptake; drafting an action plan to implement its telecommunications and ICT sector policy; completing international fibre optic connections and the national backbone; and improving governance of the sector. Locally adapted applications and content would be created and ICT entrepreneurship would be encouraged among young people. Niger had already established a higher education institute for telecommunications and joint steering committees to pilot a new ICT development initiative, and was implementing an IT training and awareness programme under the National Environment Programme for Sustainable Development.

62. **Ms. Kharashun** (Belarus) said that, efforts to bridge the digital divide between developed and developing countries and within countries between different social and demographic groups should focus on bridging the standardization gap between countries, tackling the compatibility and functional compliance of

new technologies and ensuring equal access to developments in ICT. The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) should play a key role in implementing the World Summit principle of ensuring developing countries' access to innovative developments. Given the prevalence of the Internet in all economic sectors and its growing dependence on stable, predictable and accessible networks, Internet governance must be non-discriminatory and carried out jointly by the entire international community with the equal participation of all States. It should be understandable, transparent and neutral.

63. Member States should boost United Nations efforts to develop ICT and its use for development and e-government. Consultative and technical assistance to boost the economy and competitiveness of Member States, including middle-income countries, must continue. ICT should be viewed in the broader context of access to technology — including energy, industrial and agricultural technologies — and as a key to achieving sustainable development.

64. **Mr. Andanje** (Kenya) said that, in view of the need to significantly increase access to ICTs and provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in the least developed countries by 2020 (A/71/67-E/2016/51, paras. 17 and 107), the first multi-stakeholder forum on science, technology and innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals had underscored the importance of science, technology and innovation as great levellers. However, while ICT was enabling access to global markets, enhancing wealth creation and ultimately leading to poverty eradication, developing countries had not fared well in the development of ICT.

65. Kenya regarded ICT as critical to productivity, competitiveness and a knowledge-based economy. Considerable resources had been invested in creating an enabling environment for ICT growth and a separate Ministry had been established for ICT matters. Most government services were available through ICT, 1.7 million Kenyans had registered on a platform that provided 115 services, and one-stop-shop centres would soon be available in all 47 counties. The M-PESA mobile money system had received global accolades and had transformed the banking sector. It had ushered in innovative mobile banking products and ensured that no one was left behind by providing banking services to most Kenyans who had not previously had access to a bank. Efforts must now focus on infrastructure, human resource development, stakeholder participation and an appropriate regulatory framework. Kenya Vision 2030 would address the legal and regulatory environment to stimulate ICT-related business.

66. **Mr. Liu** Jun (China) said that constant advances in ICT, including mobile broadband Internet, cloud computing and the Internet of Things, were making daily life more convenient and enhancing people's ability to understand and change the world. Those technologies were creating social and economic benefits while promoting sustainable social and economic development. The significance of ICT to achieving sustainable development at national, regional and global levels should be better understood. As recognized by the Commission on Science and Technology for Development and the Technology Facilitation Mechanism, innovation with ICT at its core could be strengthened to fully realize the role of ICT in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

67. Although significant progress had been made in building the information society, the digital divide between and within countries remained. Promoting the global diffusion of ICT to bridge that divide would help to develop better opportunities for all. In its efforts to bridge the digital divide and implement the 2030 Agenda and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, China would prioritize developing countries by providing training opportunities. It aimed to found a global development partnership to promote ICT for sustainable development and strengthen North-South and South-South cooperation. The exchange of experience and technology transfer would be employed to support talent development and institutional capacity-building. Bridging the digital divide was the only way to ensure that all people and all countries could share in the latest advances in ICT for global sustainable development.

68. In China, ICT was promoted as a path to industrialization and progress, including in urbanization and agricultural modernization. The Chinese ICT infrastructure was constantly improving, in particular through increased numbers of fixed broadband, mobile phone and mobile broadband users with third or fourth generation connections. ICT was

increasingly used in all sectors and was playing a greater role in the country's economic development. China stood ready to share its experiences with other countries and would host the third World Internet Conference in November.

69. **Mr. Alemu** (Ethiopia) said that, despite considerable progress in ICT, mobile expansion, the widening digital divide between and within countries, between rural and urban areas and the gender digital divide were causes of concern. Developing countries, particularly the least developed countries, lagged behind in harnessing digital opportunities to achieve inclusive and sustainable development. While Africa had made progress, especially in setting up legal and policy frameworks, broadband deployment and Internet access remained insufficient. The rapid development of social media had created opportunities for social inclusion and interaction; and yet it had also brought new challenges, including the abuse of social media to instigate violence and fuel social discord. It was vital to prevent the abuse of ICT by providing technical assistance to developing countries, particularly the least developed countries. United Nations agencies should improve their understanding of the rapid changes in ICT and support the efforts of developing countries to harness digital opportunities for long-term development needs and priorities. In view of the key role of ICTs in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, a strong synergy between the World Summit process and the 2030 Agenda was essential. The multi-stakeholder approach was the only way to harness the potential of ICT for sustainable development.

70. Given the enabling role of ICT in poverty eradication, his Government's ICT policy acknowledged the roles of the State, the private sector and civil society and targeted priority sectors, such as agriculture, health and education. ICT infrastructure had been built to improve the accessibility and quality of ICT-related services and an Ethiopian information technology park — Ethio ICT Village — had been opened to attract local and foreign investment. The park was designed to create a favourable business environment, harness the creativity of the private sector and generate job opportunities, particularly for young people. Already, it was facilitating technology transfer, including through public-private partnerships. E-government services were being expanded to ensure seamless connectivity throughout the country. The successful implementation of ICT policy had increased the number of mobile subscribers from 0.5 million in 2005 to 40 million in 2015, and the goal was to increase that figure to 103 million mobile subscribers by 2020. However, limited finance and capacity remained challenges. In conclusion, he welcomed the launch of the Technology Facilitation Mechanism.

71. **Mr. Hajiyev** (Azerbaijan) said that Azerbaijan recognized the critical role of ICTs in development. One of its long-term goals was to invest oil sector revenue in developing non-oil sectors and human resources to create a technologically capable, competitive and innovative economy. A national strategy had been adopted on the development of the information society. In 2013, Azerbaijan had launched its first telecommunications satellite and it planned to launch the second in 2017.

72. The Trans-Eurasian Information Super Highway, established at the initiative of Azerbaijan and supported by a special General Assembly resolution, would serve as a major element in the East-West transport corridor and facilitate direct access to the Internet backbone and information resources in 20 countries of the region. General Assembly resolution 67/298 had established the Eurasian Connectivity Alliance, which would bring together Governments, private sector and international development organizations to expand ICT networks and access. The growing importance and rapid evolution of the information society posed certain challenges, such as the risk of greater inequality arising from digital divides and threats to personal security and privacy. The cooperation of all stakeholders in addressing those challenges was critical.

73. **Mr. Adeoye** (Nigeria),welcoming positive trends in connectivity and affordability, said that ICTs held tremendous potential for the achievement of internationally agreed development goals in developing countries, and realization of the 2030 Agenda. ICT had brought progress to African countries, including growth in investment in national and international broadband infrastructure, improved connectivity, increased bandwidth and e-governance services. Mobile telephone ownership had increased rapidly, while some African countries were positioning themselves to export ICT goods and services.

Broadband deployment in Africa had not kept pace with other regions, however. Mobile telephone ownership had increased rapidly, while some African countries were positioning themselves to export ICT goods and services. Broadband deployment in Africa had not kept pace with other regions, however. He noted the widening gap in digital and broadband access between developing and developed countries, and the adverse impact of difficult economic circumstances on ICT investment and diffusion. Concerted efforts were needed to redress the digital divide, including the gender digital divide, to ensure that Africans did not miss out on economic opportunities that depended on high-quality communications.

74. People-centred, inclusive and development-oriented ICT required a greater emphasis on reducing the cost of ICTs, including broadband connectivity and capacity-building, in developing countries. The quality and quantity of telecommunications infrastructure in developing countries should be upgraded to maximize the dividends of ICT. In Nigeria, ICT infrastructure had been provided with a view to boosting job creation, business productivity and growth and wealth creation. The Government was offering incentives for the local ICT industry to deliver on its potential in such critical sectors as housing, transport, banking and research and development. The introduction of the Global System for Mobile Communications in 2001 had led to significant growth in mobile subscriptions, which had reached almost 190 million. He welcomed the outcome of the 10-year World Summit review process and its call for stronger synergies between the World Summit, the 2030 Agenda and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda. He also welcomed the active engagement of the United Nations system in promoting the use of ICT for security, knowledge, propagation and economic development. Maximizing the benefits of ICTs required improved capacity-building in policy and regulation, including more systematic data gathering and analysis to promote development outcomes in the application of ICTs.

75. **Mr. Biljeek** (Bahrain) said that his Government considered ICT a particularly important topic, given its significance for economic development. Bahrain was a leader in its region for e-government and provided services to all through a unified online portal. In 2015, the Prime Minister of Bahrain had received an ICTs in Sustainable Development Award from ITU. Bahrain was ranked first in the Middle East and eighteenth worldwide in the United Nations e-Government Survey. It was also ranked third in ICT promotion by the 2016 Global Information Technology Report of the World Economic Forum. It had just hosted its second United Nations-sponsored visit from representatives of least developed countries eager to learn from its ICT experience, and looked forward to becoming an ICT hub for the entire Middle East.

76. **Ms. Sall-Beye** (International Telecommunication Union (ITU)) said that half the world's population — more than 3 billion people — remained offline, the majority of them women. The *2016 State of Broadband Report*, produced by ITU and UNESCO, had shown that the gender digital divide was growing and that action was needed to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality. ITU estimated that there were 250 million fewer women online than men. The gender gap had grown in 2016 and remained largest in the least developed countries, where 90 per cent of the population was unconnected. At current rates of progress, far from achieving the target to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in the least developed countries by 2020, only 20 per cent of people in those countries would be reached by that deadline.

77. The gender gap could be observed in every region of the world in terms of Internet access and the ICT workforce. Empowering girls and women would solve the predicted shortfall of over 2 million jobs in the technology sector in the next five years. The need for action had led to the announcement of EQUALS: The Global Partnership for Gender Equality in the Digital Age, which was expected to become a global movement where women and girls were equal participants in the digital technology revolution. The Global Partnership directly supported progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 5, and many other Sustainable Development Goals, by enabling women to be creators and innovative leaders in a modern and connected world. Its overall goal was to bring together global stakeholders — Governments, international organizations, civil society, the private sector, philanthropic foundations and academia — to build on existing resources, networks and expertise and scale up programmes to close the gender digital divide and empower women and girls through ICTs. Its three main areas of action were access, skills and leadership. She

called on all delegations to join the Global Partnership and ensure progress on gender equality online. Without universal and affordable access to the Internet, there was no chance of achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.